

Background

The Sequoia Riverlands Trust (SRT) was awarded grant #412, in the amount of \$198,500 in the 2010-11 grant round. The grant's purpose was to conduct site evaluations and produce appraisals necessary to conserve three large ranches and one smaller one, lands strategically located to improve climate change resilience in the southern Sierra Nevada foothills. SRT's project manager has provided updates on the status of the project during the grant period and all reports have been received and approved. SRT has made substantial progress on three of the four properties originally included in the agreement. However, changes in land ownership make progress on one property infeasible and additional needs have been identified for the remaining properties.

Current Status

The SRT is requesting a grant agreement amendment to remove one property and include two additional properties in the scope of work and to make several changes to the language in the deliverables, as well as extending the grant project completion date from March to December, 2014. Because this is a substantive change to the scope of work described in Agreement #412, Board authorization is necessary.

Two large properties in Kern County would be added to the project with 16,000-acres cumulatively, 1,000-acres greater than the property that is no longer feasible in the current grant agreement. Proposed minor deliverable changes also include landowner letters of intent and conservation planning maps that can be more broadly used. In addition, the new scope of work includes the development of needs assessments for conservation plans or conservation plan amendments where approval of the conservation plans depends on the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. These plans are necessary to seek implementation funding from the Wildlife Conservation Board.

These properties are among the Southern Sierra Partnership's (SSP) top six priorities for protection, based on results of the SSP's recent climate-adapted conservation planning effort. SNC Staff has reviewed the proposed additions and is satisfied that resource benefits associated with these properties meet or exceed those that would have been realized for the property originally included in the grant. No additional funding is being sought by the grantee.

Based on staff analysis, we are recommending that the proposed revised scope of work be approved, allowing the SRT to fulfill the original intent of the grant within the amount awarded.

Next Steps

Should the Board authorize the grant amendment, the SRT would be able to complete the deliverables on the remaining viable properties and the two additional ones, resulting in greater conservation benefits in terms of the potential number of acres protected and conserved. Upon Board authorization, staff will execute an amendment to that agreement consistent with the changes described above.

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Board (a) concur that these changes do not trigger the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA); (b) approve the reauthorization of this grant for the revised project, #412, Revised Pre-acquisition Work on Four Strategic Land Conservation Projects; (c) authorize staff to enter into the necessary agreements for this project.